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# THE JEW IS NOT A SLACKER

BY LEWIS P. BROWN

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The foreign born, especially the Jews, are more apt to malingering than the native born.

THUS we read in the original manual of instructions for the Medical Advisory Boards connected with our selective draft. In the present manual this anti-Jewish remark has, by order of the President and the Secretary of War, been deleted. Had the remark been made in one of the less advanced of the European countries to-day, it would have occasioned little or no surprise. But in America, and coming from an official source, it is, to say the least of it, rather staggering. An attempt to account for its appearance and for the unhappy anti-Jewish prejudice it is but one manifestation of, gives rise to much interesting speculation.

Now there is no evidence whatsoever to prove that the foreign born Jews more often malingering than the foreign born non-Jews. Similarly it cannot be shown that the Jews, foreign born and native together, are less loyal to their country than are their non-Jewish compatriots. (On the contrary, according to the Bureau of Jewish Statistics the Jews, who form hardly three percent of our total population, have produced over four percent of our total armed forces.) How, then, shall we account for this anti-Jewish prejudice? How is it that even in official circles the notion obtains that the Jew is an almost consistent "slacker"? The prejudices of common people can be completely attributed to ignorance. But not so the prejudices of more or less intelligent and fair-minded officials. How much truth, then, underlies this opinion concerning the Jew?

It seems that at least this much is true: that flagrant instances of malingering on the part of Jews do at times occur. Such instances are marked not by their frequency so much as by their intensity. And because of this intensity they impress

most deeply the minds of those brought into contact with them. That is probably why the impression obtains that "especially" the Jews malingers. Officials connected with the draft boards tell us—and, it seems, very truthfully—that there are some Jews in this country to-day (fortunately they are very few) who will go to almost any length in their attempts to evade conscription. They will involve themselves in a whole maze of lies, they will perjure their souls and maim their bodies rather than serve in the army. They are "slackers", of course, but yet their "slacking" is not sneaky, mean, and "yellow". It is "red"; it is imbued with a peculiar zeal and passion. It is a type of "slacking" altogether anomalous—and also for that reason, most impressive—to the American born and bred.

For of course, these strange "slackers" are, almost to a man, neither American born nor bred. They may well be termed un-Americanized Jews. And any intelligent understanding of the existing notion that the Jew is a "slacker" presupposes an intelligent understanding of the life and history of this un-Americanized Jew.

The un-Americanized Jew is one who lives in this country but is not yet essentially a part of it. He is just what his name implies—an *un-Americanized Jew*. He is usually a newly-arrived immigrant. Sometimes he has lived here a decade; sometimes two; seldom more than that. Often he is already a naturalized citizen of America—political status makes little difference to one's method of thought and life. But most usually he is still a complete foreigner in this land. He is usually from Russia; but that is merely because the latest wave of immigration to this country happened to be from Russia.

What this un-Americanized Jew thinks of war can be quite briefly told. He thinks it the ugliest institution on man's earth. He hates war; he hates everything that smacks of war. Therefore he will seldom enlist of his own free will. He will seldom even submit unreluctantly to conscription. Rather he will sometimes malingers unblushingly. He will often strain every nerve—and pull every wire—in his attempt to evade the draft. And he will make his attempt not shamefacedly and with downcast head, but deliberately, almost proudly, without a qualm of conscience.—There is nothing to be gained in attempting to deny these facts. I am a Jew and a right brother to this man, but I would not attempt to

deny them. Of course, I deplore them; I am thoroughly ashamed of them; I am exceedingly glad they are true of but very few Jews; but nevertheless, I cannot deny they *are* true of those few. I know it is just because those facts are true—no matter of how few—that the impression does exist that *all* Jews are “slackers.”

But, though I am thoroughly ashamed of my brother's conduct, I find it difficult to blame him for it. He is far less at fault for his aversion to war than is the saint for his aversion to vice—or the “idle rich” for their aversion to work. This terror of war is bred in his bones; he imbibed it with his mother's milk. His whole soul rebels at thought of the “pride, pomp, and circumstance of war”. If this un-Americanized Jew sometimes attempts to evade conscription, there are many reasons for it.

In the first place, he is a foreigner, and as such, intellectually averse to war. War, he thinks, is waged only for conquest of territory. Patriotism, he believes, is merely one man's love for another man's country. When you tell him we are fighting for Democracy, he goes to the atlas to see just how large Democracy is. He cannot conceive of waging wars for ideals. In the “old country” they do not wage them—at least, not that kind.

In the second place, he is a Jew, and as such, emotionally averse to war. He is constitutionally antipathetic to physical violence. He has nothing of the berserker in him. His medieval teacher, Maimonides, cautioned him to avoid extremes and, willy-nilly, he has done so most religiously. And war is entirely a matter of extremes. . . . The dashing heroism we Occidentals so greatly admire, the heroism of those who go out into the wild places of the earth and wrestle with soil and beast and fellowman, that heroism is in part a mystery to him. It puzzles him and he feels lost when he meets with it. However, he does not despise it. The animal within him is not so dead but what tales of wild adventure will strike responsive chords within his breast. Yet he realizes only dumbly that that *something* stirring men to stake their all on one mad fling against the Infinite is a something that partakes of the divine. And that something remains foreign to him always—until he is Americanized.

Not that he is devoid of heroism now. But his heroism is less primitive, less glaring and spectacular. His life is not like the rocket which rends the dark with one red flash and

then, sputtering, dies out. It is rather like the candle which, through the long hours of the night, flickers dimly in the window of the cottage on the moor. He does not claw the naked earth amid the mountains of the West. He rather claws old rags and bones in some foul cellar on Hester Street. He seldom dreams of martial glory or of empire and dominion. He longs rather to teach his son to read the *Chumish* well. He will die for his convictions as his fathers died before him, but quietly and seriously and without gay bravado.

It is not that the martial spirit is non-existent in the Jew, but that it has been almost crushed beneath centuries of servility and oppression. And is that at all surprising? After but four centuries under Roman rule the Britons lost almost entirely the sense of fight. Is it any wonder then if after fully twenty centuries under far worse than Roman rule, without a country and without a right, these Jews seem also to have lost that sense of fight?

Powers neglected tend to atrophy. Fish in subterranean streams will lose the sense of sight. Ducks out of water will lose the ability to swim. And so men unable to use physical force lose altogether the sense of fight. Their bodies wither, and if they are to live their minds must now protect them. Their minds must become wily and sharp. Their whole life must become cerebral. They must live by their wits.

Now that is just what happened with the Jew. Early in this era he lost his country and his freedom and found himself adrift in a wide unfriendly world. Of course, had his people combined and united, then, no matter how small, it might yet have attempted to resist further aggression. But in a little while his people was scattered to the four corners of the civilized world, was scattered everywhere from England to the Upper Nile, from Portugal to the Caucasus. By the might of his arm it was impossible for him to prevail. And yet to live and to live a Jew he felt it his God-given duty. Well then, since he would preserve his life and physical prowess could not avail him, he had to fall back upon mental acumen. Since it availed him naught to whet his sword, he filled his coffers instead. It was not that the Jew was inherently a financier. But he simply had to collect shekels or else—he had to die. And collecting shekels for centuries long he soon forgot altogether that there was another weapon with which to fend off aggression. So when he was attacked he did not even dream of physical resistance. He had no confi-

dence in his own fighting powers, and his comrades were few and unable to aid him. All he could do, then, was bribe. And he bribed right and left with his hard-earned shekels—can you or I blame him for that? He was fighting for life and he had but one weapon—money, money, and money alone. Rebel, fight, resist with armed force? Good Heavens, no! He had not done that for centuries. How could he attempt it now? How could he?

That is why this brother of mine is to-day estranged from the physical. That is why emotionally he is averse to war. He has not played that game of death for nearly two millenniums. Yes, *once* he was a mighty warrior (do you remember Samson, Saul, and David,—*and the Maccabees?*). But *now* . . .

Can you wonder then if his sallow cheek blanches when of a sudden he is called to go out and kill? Can you blame him then if his bony hands tremble when ordered to go and shed blood?

But that is not all.

Many of these un-Americanized Jews are not afraid of this war merely because it is war. For those of them from Russia (and the majority of them are) it has a further and more poignant terror—the draft. Our draft recalls to them that other draft. It recalls to them the Russian draft with all the misery it entailed—its cruelty and torture, its foulness and despair. They remember how it would tear them from their homes, from their sanctified tables and hallowed synagogues, and would thrust them out among brutes of men, bestial Cossacks, who took delight in crushing their already half-crushed souls. It recalls to them those ugly years of unclean meat and unclean men and unclean thought and life. They see again in this, our draft, the darkest cloud in the dark sky of their dark Russian days.

That is why many of these un-Americanized Jews are so fearful of this draft—they think it a return to the Russian way of life. So, as in Russia, they feel it only right to strive their utmost to evade it. In Russia it was as rare to see a Jew graciously submit to conscription as it would be to see a Belgian happily submit to deportation. It was considered almost a duty of the Jew to attempt to escape conscription. It was literally true that the three great events in the Russian Jew's life were birth, exemption, and death. I have heard of and known men who lived for months on foul bread and water that

they might be too slight and weak when their time of service came. Men swallowed vials of the fieriest of spirits that their hearts might wildly palpitate when their examination came. Men bribed with their last *kopecks* the corrupt officials of the Czar, that they might remain in quiet and escape those years of pain. Can you blame them? I cannot. My father, my grand-father, and my great grand-father did it, and, had I been in their places, I would have done the same.

But that does not mean I would attempt it here. I know that here conscription assumes a far different aspect. I know that here the soldiery is clean and fine and manly. I know the officers are decent, fair, and honest. I know that the ideal soldier here is not the sneaking bully but the hail-fellow-well-met. Yes, *I* know all this, but—and here lies the root of the evil—my un-Americanized brother does not.

Can you wonder, then, if he is sometimes a “slacker”? He cannot help it. He knows no better. For all he knows our soldiers may be but newer Cossacks, and our President in war-time but another *Ivanye Ganov*. And for his ignorance and for his dread of war he deserves not harsh censure but rather kindly sympathy. You who walk free and lightly through the terrors of the hour, remember that he, poor foreign Jew, stumbles heavily beneath the burden of twenty centuries of unremitting woe. Shall you then ask him to walk with your alacrity and sprightliness? If you would measure him by your standards, then aid him to be like you. Teach him your ways and your thoughts. Americanize him. Do not ridicule and deride him. There is much that you are learning and will learn from him. Do not sneer at him; do not scorn him. (It is just the sneers and scorn of the *Goyim* that make the Jews so clannish.) But approach him sympathetically and he will readily respond. It is the sun and not the storm that makes the rosebush flower. . . .

If his obstinacy should make you lose patience—and patience runs very short in war-time—remember that the work of centuries cannot be undone in a moment. Just bear with him a little—until he is Americanized. You will find it worth your while.

LEWIS P. BROWN.